

THE Levite not to be forsaken.

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S E R M O N

P R E A C H ' D A T T H E

I N S T A L M E N T

O F T H E

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In the PASTORAL CHARGE

O F T H E

First Church of CHRIST in *Yarmouth* ;

December 10th. 1755.

By *E B E N E Z E R G A Y*, A. M.

Pastor of a Church in *Hingham*.

Neh. 13. 10. *And I perceived that the Portions of the Levites had not been given them : for the Levites and the Singers that did the Work, were fled every one to his Field.*

1 Cor. 16. 10. *Now if Timotheus come, see that he be with you without Fear, for he worketh the Work of the Lord.*

2 Cor. 7. 3. —*You are in our Hearts to die and live with you.*

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The Levite not to be forsaken.



DEUTER. XII. 19.

TAKE heed to thyself, that thou forsake not the LEVITE, as long as thou livest upon the Earth.



HE Relation of *Pastor* and *People* is sacred ; the Duties respectively incumbent on them are great and weighty, the Discharge of which requires a firm and lasting Attachment to each other. It is usual, on such Occasions as this, for the Monitor unto both, to enlarge principally upon the Minister's strict Engagements to the People, over whom he is ordain'd, or install'd ; and thence infer their reciprocal Obligations to Him. *My reverend and honoured Hearers* will allow me, at this Time, to invert the Order, and begin my Discourse with this divine Admonition to the People, — “ Take heed to thy self, that thou forsake not the *Levite*, as long as thou livest upon the Earth.”

6 *The Levite not to be forsaken.*

This solemn Charge which God gave his People of old, doth as much Concern us who live in Gospel-Times: And And in it are observable,

1st The Matter of it, viz. *Not to forsake the Levite.*— The Tribe of *Levi* was appointed by God to officiate in holy Things: To teach *Jacob his Judgments, and Israel his Law*: To put *Incense before the Lord, and whole burnt-Sacrifice upon his Altar.* * To secure to them the proper Regards of the People, God expressly forbad the forsaking them---All that wou'd imply their Neglect and Contempt of the *Levite*, and deprive them of the Use and Benefit of his holy Office.

2^{dly} The Manner in which it is deliver'd; *Take heed to thyself*: Enjoining on every one a peculiar Care of himself, more than of any beside, to keep this Charge: Intimating also the Matter introduced with so solemn a Caution to be of great Importance; and at the same Time, People's Proneness to offend in this Point, without special Care and Circumspection.

3^{dly} The Time in which it must be kept;---*As long as thou livest upon the Earth.* So long the People would need the *Levite's* Ministrations; and so long must they be careful, that they forsake him not. This Addition may also intimate, that how closely soever they adher'd to him at present, yet there was Danger of their forsaking him some Time or other afterwards, and therefore need of this Care all their Days.

Neither the Season, nor (perhaps) the Subject, will permit me to say all which the Text wou'd lead me to; I shall only point out the *Ways* in which People are apt, contrary to this solemn Charge in it, to forsake the *Levite*, the Lord's Minister, and their's, and briefly hint at the Obligations they are under, to take heed to themselves, that they do not.

First, People should take heed to themselves, that they forsake not the *Levite*, their Minister, by a blameable

* Deut. 33. 10.

Alienation of their Affections from him. This is the first, and great leading Step of a faulty forsaking the Levite : and need be most carefully guarded against. The Bond of Union betwixt Pastor and People is, Love. Their Love to him must be founded in a worthy Esteem of him ; so accounting of him, as *the Minister of Christ, and, Steward of the Mysteries of God* ; their Soul's Friend, and spiritual Father. As such, they are to esteem him very highly (more than abundantly) *in Love for his Works sake* ; § which may hereby be render'd more easy to him, and advantageous unto them. But, the Love of many, tho' fervent at first, is apt to wax Cold toward their Minister. The wily Adversary of Souls hath not a more subtil and effectual Device, to obstruct a Minister's Usefulness, and hinder the Success of the Gospel, among a People, than to raise in them an ill Opinion of their Minister. And this he often finds no hard Matter to do ; People being very apt to imbibe Prejudices against him ; to entertain evil Surmisings, and to listen to bad Stories concerning him. Sooner, it seems, and upon slighter Grounds, are they offended with him, than with a Man of another Order. There might be those among the Jews, that liv'd as abstemiously, as *John Baptist* ; yet because he came neither eating, nor drinking, as ordinarily Men do, they said, *be bath a Devil. The Son of Man came eating, and drinking, no otherwise than sober Folks do* ; and they said, *Behold, a Man gluttenous, and a Wine-bibber, a Friend of Publicans and Sinners.* † So that perfect Innocence in a Minister wou'd not secure him from the Misrepresentations of Malice ; and the common Imperfections of a mortal Nature in him, are look'd upon as no little Crimes. His very Friends, as if they expected angelic Perfection in him, can hardly make him the Allowance that is thought due to the Frailty of Mankind, but are disposed to take critical Notice of his Failings, to aggravate his Errors, and expose his Misconduct, under the secret, unsuspected Influence of our common Adversary, the malignant Spirit of

§ 1 Thess. 5. 13. † Math. 11. 18.

Darkness. For his Faithfulness to them, People are sometimes disaffected to their Minister, and think he is become their *Enemy* because he tells them *the Truth*; as the *foolish Galatians* did St. *Paul*, whom they once so passionately loved, as that, if it had been possible, they would have pluck'd out their own Eyes, and have given them to him: As he bears them Record in Chap. 4 of his Epistle to them, Ver. 15. There is no Minister therefore so inoffensive in his Life and Office, nor so well-beloved of his People, but there is Danger of their being loosened in their Affections from him, by some Means or other: And they need always take heed to themselves, that they be not: For they are like to suffer most by it themselves. 'Tis indeed a sore Trial to a good Minister of Jesus Christ, who gladly spends, and is spent for Souls, to find, that the more abundantly he loves, the less he is loved;---To see those whose Happiness he earnestly wisheth, and unweariedly laboureth for, embitter'd against him. But this grieveth him most, as it tends to the Hindrance of the Gospel, and hurt of their Souls. He hath great Heaviness and continual Sorrow of Heart, on their Account: He is far from making light of the Prejudices with which the Minds of his People are soured against him, how groundless and unjust soever they be, because of the Damage which doth thence accrue to them. *I am afraid of you*, said *Paul* to those who were alienated in their Affections from him, *lest I have bestowed upon you Labour in vain: Brethren, I beseech you be as I am, for I am as ye are, ye have not injured me at all;|| not at all in comparison of the Wrong ye have done your own Souls.* As People love their own Souls therefore, they must take heed to themselves, that they loose not their *first Love* to their Minister: that they do not, thro' natural Inconstancy, or the Prevalence of any Corruption within, or Temptation from without, become ill-affected toward his Person, and grow into a weariness and disrelish of his Administrations. And this Heed People should early take to

themselves ; even in determining their Choice of, and fixing their Affections on a Minister. If they are govern'd herein by their fluctuating Passions, and uncertain Humours, and the varying Circumstances of Time and Place,---If they are influenc'd by sinister Views, and have any Man's Person in Admiration, *because of Advantage*, to serve a Turn, and accomplish some Design of Revenge, or Avarice, or Ambition ; 'tis no wonder, that they prove unstable as Water, change with the Wind, and vary as the Contingencies of worldly Affairs. Affections that are not guided by Judgment, are fickle and vagrant, and never well settled. If People's Esteem for a Minister be not grounded in the solid and substantial Qualifications of such an One, his good Knowledge, and Aptness to teach ; his Prudence and Steadiness of Behaviour ; his Piety, and Fidelity ;---if it be rais'd on no firmer Bottom, than some little Accomplishments of Nature, or Art, and those superficial Ornaments of Gesture and Address, with which weak Minds are at first extremely captivated, it is not likely to continue. People may zealously affect a Minister, *but not well*, and therefore not long. Many are affected toward a Preacher, as Stony-ground Hearers are to the Word itself ; They hear him, and anon with Joy (almost to a Transport) receive him ; yet have they not Root in themselves, but are well-pleased for a while only, for when any Thing ariseth a little crossing their Inclination, or Interest, by and by they are offended.*

Secondly, People should take heed to themselves, that they forsake not the *Levite*, their Minister, by a parsimonious withholding of due Maintenance from him. It was with a special Regard to the *Levite's* outward Support, that this Charge was given the *Israelites*, lest, thro' Covetousness, they should defraud him of that Provision which God by his Law had made therefor. 'Tis repeated, and the Reason of it adjoyn'd, Ch. 14. v. 27, *And the Levite that is within thy Gates, thou shalt not forsake him : for he hath no Part nor Inheritance with thee.* The Rea-

* Matth. 13. 20.

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son assignd why they should not forsake him, sheweth this Way of forsaking him to be especially intended and cautioned against ; the withholding from him what is suitable, and sufficient for him to eat and drink, and rejoice before the Lord ; seeing he had not Land of his own, to supply this unto himself — had not an Inheritance divided by Lot to him with the rest of his Brethren. The Tribe of *Levi*, for the better Execution of their Office, was dispersed among all the Tribes ; in which they had at first forty-eight Cities, and afterward, when they were much encreased, twenty more with their Suburbs, laid out to them. These were only for them to build Houses, and feed some Cattle in. They had not Possessions of Vineyards and Fields ; the Care of which wou'd not consist well with the Busineſſ they were devoted to. And for their Support and Encouragement in it, God tho't it not too much for them to have a *Tenth* of the Encrease of the Land, throughout the whole Country ; a Part in every Sacrifice that was offered, excepting the *Holocaust* ; and many other Revenues. † The defrauding them of which, is express'd by forsaking the *Levite* ; and called robbing of God, and was punished by him, *Malac. 3. 8, 9,* “ Will a Man rob God ? Yet ye have robbed me : But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee ? In Tithes and Offerings. Ye are cursed with a Curse ; for ye have robbed me, even this whole Nation.” The Jews have not been the only guilty Nation in this Matter. People under the Gospel should take heed and beware of Covetousness, that they may not, in like manner, rob God, and be cursed of him, not only in their Estates, but also in their Souls, for the sacrilegious Detention of his Rights. It is as plainly a Transgression of his Law thus to forsake a Minister now, as it was of old so to forsake the *Levite* : *I Cor. 9. 13, 14,* “ Do ye not know that they which minister about holy Things, live of the Things of the Temple ? and they which wait at the Altar, are Partakers with the Altar ? Even so hath the Lord ordained, that they which

† Numb. 18. Deut. 18.

preach the Gospel, should live of the Things of the Gospel : ” And *to live*, both in common and scriptural Language, is more than to have barely enough to keep Soul and Body together : It is to be supplied with the Conveniences, as well as Necessaries of human Life : Else *living of the Gospel*, wou’d be in no measure parallel, or comparable to, and scarce have been mention’d with, *living of the Things of the Temple*. There is certainly as great Occasion of the Lord’s thus providing for the Maintenance of them that preach the Gospel, out of their Auditor’s Substance ; for, tho’ he hath not said, they shall have no Inheritance with their Brethren, yet their prudent Fathers, who design them for that Service, rarely in their last Wills and Testaments give them any ; trusting the Lord will be their Inheritance, as he was the *Levites*. They have not among us, such a Proportion of the Land, as forty-eight Cities, with their Suburbs, were to *Canaan* ; nor *Presents* equalling the Free-willOfferings to the Priests ; nor *Salaries* scarcely exceeding in Value the Skins of the *Jewish* Sacrifices, and Tithes of their Garden-herbs — *Anise, Mint and Cummin*. Do they who preach the Gospel then, live of the Gospel, according to God’s Ordinance, as they who ministered about holy Things under the Law, lived of the Things of the Temple ? By the Nature of their Profession, they are debarr’d the Use of ordinary Means to get a Livelihood, and provide for their Families. As to any lucrative Employment therein, they are shut out from Courts and Camps : and ’tis pity they are not, by universal Custom, as I think they are by the Evangelical Law, from Shops and Fields also. For the intangling themselves in the Affairs of this Life, necessarily hinders the doing of their proper Work. If they thrive by Trade ; or have Plenty by tilling their Land, they starve their Flocks. And if they turn Physicians, and gain most by healing Men’s Bodies, they must neglect the Cure of Souls ; and ’tis at the greatest Expence any People do much improve them as such. The Exigency therefore, and Equity of the Case, the Honour of God, the Interest

of People, as well Temporal as Spiritual, require a liberal Maintenance of Christ's Ministers, in the Way which the Gospel prescribes, suitable to the Dignity of their laborious, expensive, and beneficial Office ----But to dwell on so unpopular a Theme, as little gratifies an uncomplaining Preacher, as it doth an avaritious Hearer. The Text will apologize for the mention of it, if there be no need thereof in this Audience.-----I go on to say,

Thirdly, People should take heed to themselves, that they forsake not the *Levite*, their Minister, by frequent *absenting* themselves from his Administrations. Forsaking the House of God, is the same as forsaking the Levite, in the Language of the *Old-Testament*, Neh. 10. 31, *We will not forsake the House of our God*. People forsake a Minister of the *New-Testament*, by "forsaking the assembling themselves together, as the manner of some*" was in the Apostles Days ; and is of more in our's. The Caution given Christians, not to forsake the public Assemblies for Religion, includes this not to forsake the *Masters* of them ; as People do, in a faulty Degree, by Inconstancy in their Attendance ; by frequent unnecessary absenting themselves from the Ordinances of divine Worship, the Word preached, Sacraments, and Prayers.

The Gospel-Minister is strictly charg'd to give Attendance to the Duties of his Office : to Exhortation, to Doctrine ; to *continue* in them ; to give himself wholly to them ;----to preach the Word, be instant in Season, out of Season ;---to give himself *continually* to Prayer, and to the Ministry of the Word. And this implies as indispensably strong Obligation on the People constantly to attend upon his Ministry. He could not be bound, and they left at their Liberty in this Matter. Necessity is laid upon them to hear, as well as upon him to preach ; yea, wo unto them, if they hear not the Gospel ; if they refuse Audience to Christ's Ambassador. There are some, in most Places, who wou'd rarely, if ever, come to him, and hear the Word preached, were it not for Custom, or the Coercion of human Laws. Many

who

who thro' Indulgence to their Ease, or on some slight Pretence, or other, come not to hear it ; when, perhaps, they wou'd complain grievously of their Minister, should he, for weightier Reasons, omit preaching it. And must he attend to this very Thing constantly, and they not be bound to attend in the proper Seasons ? The Causes of such forsaking him are bad ; either supine Negligence, Stupidity and Sloth, indisposing them to mind the Concerns of Religion, and their Souls : or, Profaneness and wilful Contempt, not only of God's Authority, but also of his Wisdom and Goodness, in the Institution of the Gospel Ministry : or a factious Prejudice against the Person, or Way of him that doth exercise it. And the Consequences of frequent absenting therefrom are bad also ; Men do hereby starve their own Souls, as certainly as they would their Bodies by neglecting their Meals in the Returns of necessary Occasion for them. Depriving their Souls of that Food which is of the Bounty of God's Grace provided for them, they can have but a meagre Piety, if any. They keep themselves at a distance from the appointed Means of being well-instructed and quickned in the Way to eternal Life ; judge themselves unworthy of it, putting the Word of God from them.--When any one heareth the Word of the Kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked One, and catcheth away that which was sown in his Heart : But they save the Devil that trouble, who do not give it a Hearing.

Fourthly, People should take heed to themselves, that they forsake not the *Levite*, their Minister, by sinful *Apostacy* from the Religion he teacheth — departing from the Faith which he preacheth. “ The Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter Times some shall depart from the Faith.” This is foretold in Scripture, and verified in every Age of the Christian Church. There are often those who do not continue stedfastly in the Apostle's Doctrine, and so renounce their faithful Minister's, which is agreeable to it : And when they do so, they may be said to forsake him ; even tho' they should continue to hear him, and contribute to his

Support,

Support, and retain an Affection for his Person. So far as they dissent in Opinion and Practice from the *Truth*, which he tells them, so far do they forsake him, as their spiritual Guide. The *Galatians* not obeying the Truth, is by St. *Paul* complain'd of, as their being *removed* from him that called them into the Grace of Christ, unto another Gospel. * " People are apt thus to forsake their Minister, when his Doctrine happens to oppose some favourite Nations or indulged Lusts of their's. Tho' he preacheth the Faith which was once delivered to the Saints, yet if he contradict their prejudicate Opinions, any religious Principles which they received, with their vain Conversation, by Tradition from their Fathers ; or which have been dictated to them by such as they call *Masters* on Earth, they presently reject him, and will not in those Points (at least) be his Disciples. So tenacious are they wont to be of their pre-conceived wrong Notions, that the greatest Force of Reason, and Evidence of Scripture will not make them give up the same ; lest they shou'd loose the Satisfaction of having been always in the Right, and the stronger the Light beareth upon their Minds, so impenetrably darkned with the Prejudices of Education, the more it offends them ; as *Paul's* Preaching did the *Jewiſh* Bigots, who spake against those Things which were spoken of him, *contradicting, and blaspheming*. † Whereas People should allow their Minister, and use themselves, the Liberty of sober Inquiry, and not oblige or tempt him to preach for Christian Doctrine the Inventions and Commandments of Men, how venerable soever for Age, Learning, or Piety. They shou'd be so noble and ingenuous, as to *search the Scriptures daily, whether those Things are so*, which their Minister tells them : examine the Grounds of their Belief ; open their Minds to Conviction, and yield to Evidence. And they will be no Losers by quitting any favourite Tenets, which shall be found not to agree with the Scripture *Form of sound Words*, which they should hold fast. Men's beloved Lusts, as well

* Gal. 1. 5. † Acts 13. 45.

as darling Opinions, often cause them to forsake the Doctrine of their Minister, which is according to Godliness, and checketh them in the eager Pursuit of their bad Designs, and dampeth the free Enjoyment of unlawful Pleasures, and disturbeth the Course of their vicious Practices : “ Whatever corrupt Affection a Man be possessed with, it will work in him a Distaste, and a Repugnance to that Doctrine, which indispensably, as a Condition of Salvation, doth prescribe and require universal Holiness, Purity, Innocence, Virtue and Goodness ; which doth not allow of any one Sin to be fostered or indulged ; which threatneth Wrath and Vengeance upon all Impiety, Iniquity and Impurity, wherein we do obstinately persist.” The predominate Lust in Men, be it that of the Flesh, or that of the Eye, or the Pride of Life, hath commonly that Influence upon their Conduct toward a Minister, which *Herodias* had upon *Herod’s* toward *John* : It suffers them to bear him gladly for a Season, and it may be also to do many Things upon his Exhortation : But when he doth the Part of a faithful Prophet, and saith to them as plainly as the *Baptist* to the *Tetrarch*, *It is not lawful for you to have and cherish that Lust in your Bosom*, and urges them to put it away, it makes them forsake him, ‘if it does not prompt them to persecute him. They take Disgust at his Doctrine, which will not let them enjoy their former Sentiments and Vices : Whatever suiteth not to their Prepossessions and Passions ; whatever crosseth their Fancy, their Humour, their Appetite, their Interest, is a hard and harsh Saying, at which they sometimes take such Offence as those Disciples of Christ, of whom we read in *John* 6. 66, that on a like Occasion, *went back, and followed no more with him.*

Fifthly, People should take heed to themselves, that they forsake not the *Levite*, their Minister, by an unfriendly Neglect of him in his Afflictions ; especially in Sufferings for the Gospel. — Not to enumerate the Infirmitie, Necessities, Temptations, Troubles, Decays of bodily Strength,

Strength, or mental Powers ; Difficulties of all Sorts, to which he is equally subject as other Men, and in which they ought tenderly to sympathize with him, and to their utmost relieve and comfort him ; as he is bound to do, with respect to them : His Afflictions, which I more especially intend here, are those which he endures for Christ, and the Gospel.

'Tis an old Maxim and Method of Persecution, *Smite the Shepherd, and the Sheep shall be scattered.* When the Sons of Violence laid Hands on the chief Shepherd, our Lord JesusChrist, *then all his Disciples forsook him and fled.* The smiting of the Under-Shepherds is usually attended with the scattering of the Sheep. A Storm of Persecution breaks first, and falls heaviest, upon the Preachers of Righteousness. *Maximinus* commanded that only the Governors of the Church should be slaughtered, as the Authors of the Growth and Prevalency of Christian Doctrine. That bloody Tyrant was not singular in this Practice ; but wherever Christianity hath been in the most cruel Manner persecuted, the Ministers of it have tasted deepest of that Cup. To escape these Sufferings for Christ, unsound Professors of him have been wont to forsake him, and his Confessors. It is base Cowardice and Treachery in Christian-People, to desert their Leaders in a great *Fight of Afflictions*, 2 Tim. 4. 16, "At my first Answer no Man stood with me, but all Men forsook me : I pray God that it may not be laid to their Charge." At *Paul's* first Appearing in the Court of *Rome*, none of the Christians there stood by him, to deliver him out of the *Mouth of the Lion* : None dar'd to own him, or give Testimony in his Defence : They left him to plead and shift for himself. This was a Sin in them, which he earnestly prayed might be forgiven them. We might soon expect such like Trials of People's Adherence to their Pastors in this Land, if the *Papal* Tyranny should once get Possession of the *British Throne*, which we pray God of his Mercy to prevent. But there are other *Afflictions* of the Gospel, besides Bonds, Imprisonments,

forments, and Martyrdoms, that always more or less abide the faithful Ministers of Christ, in which People should be Partakers, & cannot without Sin forsake them. Too apt are many to be drawn into Party-strife with the Minister, which ariseth from Enmity to the Gospel ; and instead of vindicating him from unjust Reproaches, and defending him against the Insults and Abuses of *unreasonable Men*, join with those who say to them, “ Come, and let us devise Devices against him, and let us smite him with the Tongue, and not give heed to any of his Words.” * People should not stand with their Minister in that which is not justifiable ; yet the Mischiefs they commonly suffer from a needless Quarrel against him, might (one would think) make all that are wile for themselves, very cautious how they engage in it. And what could more discourage them from having a Hand in any injurious Treatment of him, than those Words in the prophetical Blessing wherewith *Moses*, the Man of God, blessed *Levi*, Deut. 33. 11, *Bless, Lord, his Substance, and accept the Work of his Hands ; smite through the Loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again.*

Sixtly, People should take heed to themselves, that they forsake not the *Levite*, their Minister, by unreasonable Separation from him. Their Dismission of a Pastor is not always such. In some Cases this is not only warrantable, but commendable. ’Tis a schismatical Withdrawing from one, that People are caution’d against. They should take heed to themselves, that they do not so forsake a Minister of the Lord’s sending, to follow one that is not. This was the Sin of *Jeroboam*, and by it he made *Israel* to sin ; “ to cast off the Ministers of the Lord, and make Priests of the lowest of the People ; which were not of the House of *Levi*.” It was the Sin of many in the Days of the Apostles, notwithstanding the Miracles which attested their Mission, to leave them, and become the Disciples of false Teachers. There hath been more or less of this evil Practice in every Age of

* Jer. 18. 18

the Christian Church. When a Man being counted faithful, upon approving himself such, is regularly put into the Ministry, and set over a People in the Lord, it is a dangerous Error in them, to separate themselves from him, and go after *Seducers*: to attend the Ministry of such as are uncalled to the sacred Office, *Jer. 23. 32*, "I sent them not, nor commanded them; therefore they shall not profit this People at all." We cannot but pity those among us, who, of late Years, in one Place, and another, so forsake *a good Minister of Jesus Christ*, and blindly follow blind Guides:--- Teachers, that, in respect of Ability for the Work, are, like *Jeroboam's Priests*, *of the lowest of the People*. If those *Chemarim** were fit to be Priests to them that were no Gods, and well enough qualified to carry Straw to the *Calves* at *Dan* and *Bethel*, these cannot be thought so to minister at God's Altar, and to feed Men's Souls with Knowledge and Understanding.

People should further take heed, that they forsake not the Minister, under whom they are orderly placed, for another, as truly authorised, and equally, or even better able, to teach. It is the Ordinance of God, that every Pastor, should have his own Flock to attend, and take heed unto: || And every Flock should adhere to it's own faithful Pastor. People should take heed, that they do not out of Levity and Inconstancy of Mind, or the Itching of their Ears after Novelties, or the Prevalence of some foolish Humour; or sinful Corruption, heap to themselves Teachers, and go after *Strangers*. When, and how far, a regard to their Edification, will justify their leaving the Pastor, under whose peculiar Care they have chosen to put themselves, and ordinarily to attend the Ministry of Another, is by some made a Case of Conscience, which I have not room here to discuss: But would advise those who make this Pretence for their Separation from their Pastor, to read and ponder and apply a short Passage in St. John's Gospel, Chap. 6. ver. 66,--- "From that Time many of his Disciples went back, and

* *Hos. 10. 5.* *Zeph. 1. 4.* || *Acts 14. 23.* *Tit. 1. 5.*

"walked

"walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the Twelve, will ye also go away ? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go ? Thou hast the Words of eternal Life." Why should they leave a Minister that hath, and faithfully speaketh the Words of that Life ? Another may for a while better please their Fancies, or move their sensitive Passions ; but can he more profit their Souls ? Is there not more to be expected from the Gospel-Ministry, as it is an Ordinance of Christ, than as it is barely the Performance of a Man, tho' ever so learned and eloquent, so good and zealous ? "By over-looking the Institution of God, and having too-raised Expectations from Man, we provoke him to blast the most promising Means. On the contrary, a weaker Ministry is oft-times greatly bless'd, when it is the best Persons can conveniently and regularly enjoy, and is attended upon from a Sense of Duty to God, in Obedience to his Command, and with Dependence upon his Presence and Blessing. It may be happy for a People to have a Minister, who, by long Acquaintance with them, best knows their State, and most *naturally cares for it* ; and between whom and them there is, by this Means, a mutual strong Endearment. The causless forsaking him, or *putting him away*, as we vulgarly express it, and this when he is old, may be little to their spiritual Advantage. 'Tis plainly a Breach of Covenant, an Infringement on the Rule of Gospel-Order, and contrary to the wise Man's Advice, *Thine own Friend, and thy Father's Friend, forsake thou not.*||

Having shown the Obligations lying upon People, to take heed unto themselves, that they forsake not the *Levite* their Minister, I would thence infer and urge *bis*, to take heed unto *himself*, that he forsake not them, and give them no Occasion to forsake him. The whole Duty of a Gospel-Minister toward his People, which he is solemnly charged to take heed unto himself, that he faithfully perform it, is comprised in *bis not forsaking them* ; as their's toward him is in *their not forsaking him*. This does not imply, that he

must continue with the People which he takes the Pastoral Charge of, as long as he liveth upon the Earth : or may not, on any Account, go from them. If the Case of a Minister were so with his People, and they were thus indissolubly married, he might be tempted to say, *it is not good to be a Minister* ; and they, that it is not so to have one. There may be as clear a Call in Providence for them to part from each other, as there was for them to come together, in that Relation. The Good of the Church may require the *Translation* of a Minister from one Place to another ; as is more frequent and peaceable in other Protestant Countries, than in this. But 'till there is sufficient Reason to think that a Man, whom the Holy Ghost hath made the Overseer of a particular Flock, is as plainly called of God, to resign his Pastoral Charge of it, he must abide with his People ; and on no worldly Consideration of Ease, or Honour, or Profit, go from them to another. A Minister must not be a *Runagate*, nor a *Non-Resident*. He should take heed unto himself, that he do not, thro' Cowardice, or Avarice, or any corrupt and irregular Passion, forsake his People, as long as he liveth upon the Earth ; lest God should rebuke him as he did the Prophet, *1 Kings 19. 9,* *What doest thou here, Elijah ?----Wo (saith the Lord) to the Idol-Shepherd, that leaveth the Flock.* + But,

A Minister must take heed unto himself, that he forsake not his People worse, even while he continues to live with them, by failing to discharge well and truly his Office among them,---By being wanting in his affectionate Regards for them---not maintaining in his Heart a sollicitous Care of their Souls, greatly longing after them all in the Bowels of Jesus Christ. St. Paul, tho' *absent in the Flesh* from his beloved *Colossians*, was yet *with them in the Spirit.** A Minister may be present with his People in the Flesh, but absent in the Spirit : his Heart may be gone from them : he may have left his first Love ; and if so, he hath, to a criminal Degree, forsaken them.----A Minister should take heed to

+ Zech. 11. 17. * Col. 2. 5.

himself, that he, *Demas-like*, thro' Love of this *present World*, forsake not his Calling, or his People, by suffering his Heart to go after his Covetousness ; seeking not them, but their's ; being *greedy of filthy Lucre*, and never having enough---always complaining of, and even preparing War against, those that put not into his Mouth ;--or with *feigned Words* making *Merchandise* of them : or abusing the plentiful Provision granted for his Maintenance to Pride, Luxury, and Idleness : which cannot be denied to have been too often the Case of a *fat Clergy* ; and if it be true of our's in this Land, let the People be less blamed for *pit-tancing* of them.

A Minister should take heed unto himself, that he forsake not his People by *Slothfulness* in his Business--not prosecuting his Studies with unwearied Diligence, that he may always have a Treasure of Knowledge, out of which, as a good Houholder, he may bring forth to them Things *new and old* :--or by not giving constant Attendance to Reading, to Exhortation, to Doctrine, that his Profiting may appear ; which it hardly will unless he give himself wholly to these Things ; and spend his Time and Pains in the continual Instruction, Visitation, and Consolation of his People ; not being diverted therefrom by the vain Amusements of Pleasure and Company, or the Avocations of worldly Business.

A Minister should take heed unto himself, that he forsake not his People, in respect of *Personal Conference* with them, as there may be needful Occasion thereof, for the rectifying their Judgments, satisfying their Scruples, removing their Prejudices, relieving their Infirmities, sympathising with their Afflictions, corporal and spiritual : and that he leave them not unguarded against approaching Dangers ; the Encroachments, of Error and Iniquity ; the fallacious Arts of Impostors, and violent Assaults of open Adversaries to Truth and Piety. A Minister should take heed unto himself ; that he forsake not his People, by turning himself from the Truth, and the Way of Righteousness. If thro' Neglect, or Abuse of the Advantages he hath of knowing and doing better

better than they, he is *led away with the Error of the Wicked*, and does not in his Doctrine adhere to the Truth, as it is in Jesus ; nor in his Conversation go before his Flock, as an Example to it of Practical Religion, he criminally forsakes them, and they may forsake him, and not be guilty of forsaking the *Levite* : for they must not follow him into the Ditch of noxious Error, and wicked Practice :---an heretical and vicious Minister is the most abandon'd Creature on Earth---rejected of God and Men, *Hos. 4. 6*, “ Because “ thou hast rejected Knowledge, I will also reject thee, that “ thou shalt be no Priest to me ; seeing thou hast forgotten “ the Law of thy God, I will also forget thy Children.” *Mal. 2. 7, 8*, “ For the Priest's Lips should keep Know-“ ledge, and they should seek the Law at his Mouth ; for “ he is the Messenger of the Lord of Hosts. But ye are “ departed out of the Ways ye have caused many to stum-“ ble at the Law : ye have corrupted the Covenant of *Levi*, “ faith the Lord of Hosts. Therefore have I also made you “ contemptible and base before all the People, according “ as ye have not kept my Ways.” To which Consideration what more Weight need be, or can be, added, to enforce the solemn Caution given the Evangelic *Levite*, to take heed unto himself, that he fail not to perform faithfully all the Parts of his arduous and important Office ?---*The Lord help me to apply what hath been said on this Head to my own Soul !----*

And you must suffer me, *Dear Brother*, to address the Counsel of God, to your self also particularly, now you are to take the Pastoral Charge of a beloved Flock of our Lord Jesus Christ in this Place. You cannot, and others (I hope) will not, misconstrue the present Discourse, as impeaching your Conduct in the Separation which hath happen'd betwixt you and the People, over which you was ordain'd. The Reasons and Grounds of it were examin'd by proper Judges, who acquitted you of all Blame in that Matter. And it would be very invidious in any to say unto you, as *Eliab* did to *David*, who, by his Father's Order, brought

a fresh Supply of Provision for his Brethren at the Camp of Israel ; *Why cameſt thou down bither ? and with whom baſt thou left those few Sheep in the Wilderness ?* † As your Dismission from the Care of a little Flock was regular, so your Call to take the Over-sight of this is (we trust) clear. And it is now incumbent on you, to take heed unto your ſelf, that you forsake not this People, by any ſtraying Steps in the Course of your Ministry : And that you give them no Offence in any Thing, or occasion to forsake you. The Work of the Ministry was, at your Seperation to it, clearly and fully ſet before you, in a Sermon * which you have in your Hand : I may well be excus'd therefore for not enlarging upon it in this. Only let me exhort you to ſee to it, that it be the Love of a precious Christ, and of precious Souls, which constraineth you to re-assume the *Paſtoral Charge* ; the Weight of which (methinks) the Man who hath felt it, and is fairly ſet at Liberty from it, muſt tremble again to undertake. Love to Christ and Souls, prevailing above your Regards to what you might hope to enjoy in this World, and fear to meet with in the next, ſhould engage your Heart in their Service, not to be performed without great Difficulty and Danger to yourſelf. Love is the uniting Affection, the sweet and strong Bond of Duty ; and will hold you close to your's ; and make Christ's Yoke, which you take upon you, easy, and the Hardships of a Shepherd's Life ; the nipping Frosts, and ſweltring Heats, and tedious Watchings, you muſt endure, in feeding and defending of his Sheep and Lambs, not only tolerable, but delightful to you---as Jacob's ſeven Years hard Service for Rachel, in which the Drought conſumed him by Day, and the Frost by Night, and his Sleep departed from his Eyes, ſeemed unto him but a few Days, for the Love he had to her.

Let my Advice be more acceptable to you, than the ſame from wiser and (perhaps) older Men was to a young

† 1 Sam. 17. 28.

* Preached by the Rev. Mr. SKINNER from Rev. 2. 10.

King, viz. to make your People's Yoke [a Yoke which many think themselves not able to bear] as light, by your Frugality and Contentment, as will consist with your serviceable and comfortable Dwelling among them. It was Part of St. Paul's Care of the Churches, not to be burdensome to them, being persuaded, that they would forgive him that Wrong ; yea, be the better pleased with him. A Defect of Maintenance is indeed a *privative Persecution*, in which a Minister may, as the Case shall be circumstanced, have that Allowance to go from his People, which our Lord gives in Matth. 10. 23, *When they persecute you in this City, flee ye to another.* But he will not so depart but upon urgent Necessity, when Poverty cometh as *one that travaileth* (a swift High-way-man, to strip him of all he hath) and *Want* as an *armed Man* ; more formidable than the *Wolf*, which the *Hireling*, when he seeth coming, flyeth, because he is an *Hireling*, and careth not for the Sheep. I hope you will never be tempted, or have just Occasion so to forsake this Flock ; but you must know, that a parsimonious Detention of his Right, which would warrant a Minister's thus leaving his People, will not excuse his forsaking them, by Negligence in his Work, while he continues with them in it : and his reaping sparingly of their carnal Things, will not justifie his sowing sparingly of spiritual unto them. Gladly spend therefore, and be spent for the Souls of this People, tho' it should happen, that the more abundantly you loved them, the less you should be loved by them. Let your great Concern be to do your Work faithfully, and you serve too good a Master to let you want that which is good for you. You may depend on his Promise and Care, that you shall not be forsaken (which David never saw the Righteous) in respect of a Competency of outward good Things. Of *Levi*, it is said, " He hath no Part nor Inheritance with his Brethren ; the Lord is his Inheritance, according as the Lord thy God promised him. * Our Lord said to his first Ministers, " When I sent you

* Deut. 10. 9.

without Purse, and Scrip, and Shoes, lacked ye any Thing ? And they said, *Nothing.*" † By taking due heed to your-self, and to your Doctrine, and continuing in them, you will not forsake your People in any forbidden Way ; and will do all that is required of you to prevent their forsaking you. Shun not to declare the whole Counsel of God to them, nor spare their Vices, soothing them up in their Sins, through fear of disgusting them : You will give the greatest Offence by avoiding it, in that Way ; and expose your Office to Contempt, as well as hazard the Salvation of your own Soul.—And yet, a great deal of Prudence must be used by you in the Delivery of the Truth, and all your Behaviour in the House of God, that, if it be possible, you may give no Offence to any, and the Ministry, by your Misconduct, be not blamed—You must be compliant, as far as you can, with the various Tempers of People, and made all Things (Unfaithfulness to your Trust excepted) to all Men. Be not weary of well-doing ; wax not careless of your Charge, and unconcerned to provide Food suitable for the Souls of your People : put them not off with raw, unstudied Sermons. Let every Discourse from the Pulpit be instructive, entertaining, and edifying, that your Hearers, at the Close of it, may be ready to say, as *David* to a Messenger of Peace, “*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this Day to meet me : And blessed be thy Advice, and blessed be thou.*” || Your Diligence, Prudence, and Fidelity, in the Discharge of your whole Office, will oblige this People to you in the strongest Ties of Conscience, and Affection ; and be most likely to hold them with you, till you shall not be suffered to continue with them, by reason of Death. But if, notwithstanding all your Care to perform faithfully your Duty toward them, they should before that forsake you, yet shall you not be a Cast-away : God will make good to you his Word, on which he causeth you to hope, *I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee*—To which (having no more to wish you) we all say, *Amen.*

The People of God in this Place will receive the cautionary Direction of the Text as needful at least, and as suitable for them, as it would be for any other, in the Settlement of a Minister among them.

Men and Bretbren,

I speak not the Things which you hear this Day, to shame you, but as my beloved Friends, I warn you, and the rather I own, because of what hath all along happen'd in this Church, *viz.* A Separation between Pastor and People before, and otherwise than by Death; which should move you to take the more heed unto yourselves, that there be not again such, through your Default. I mean not to reproach you, or your Fathers, on account of the Dismission of any Minister heretofore; nor to say, in any Instance, where the Blame (if there was any) should be laid. But having in Days of Trouble and Temptation which formerly passed over this Church, seen here the Mischief of Strife with a Pastor, so often issuing in the Dissolution of that Relation, I cannot refrain speaking to warn you of it. There will (I hope) be the ready Reflections of Conscience upon whatever might be amiss in parting with your late worthily *beloved Minister*, which was wondered at and regretted by us at a Distance, and unacquainted (perhaps) with the real Grounds and Reasons of it. And if your Hearts condemn you not at all, in that Matter, yet such an Event may be wisely improved to make you very cautious of giving any Occasion of your being so afflicted and forsaken, in Time to come. And unless you take heed to yourselves, that you forsake not the *Levite*, in any Steps of your Fore-Fathers, which you may possibly know were not right, your Sin and Danger will be the greater: And you cannot make so plausible a Pretence, that if you had liv'd in their Days, you would not have been Partakers with them in any improper Treatment of the Lord's Messengers, as even the Persecutors of Christ and his Apostles did, that they would not have been so with their Fathers in the *Blood of the Prophets*, by building the *Tombs of the Prophets*, and garnishing the *Sepulchres of the Righteous*.

Righteous. But, Beloved, We hope better Things of you, than we may fear have sometimes been in this Place ; that such a hearty and happy Union between Pastor and People will be this Day effected, as shall not, but by Death be dissolved.—That you will take heed, and beware of every evil Way, in which People are liable to forsake their Minister : And if your's, being subject to Error and Sin, as well as you, should be misled thereinto, and not perform faithfully every Part of his Duty towards you, admonish him thereof seasonably, and modestly ; entreating him as a *Father*, and not dealing by him as an *Enemy*, in concealing your Resentment of Offences taken, till you have an Opportunity to *cast him off* ; which is too often the Manner of disaffected People ; contrary to the Apostle's Direction in *Col. 4. 17*, “ Say to *Archippus* take heed to the Ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.” Take heed, how you hear ; and that the Word preached by him profiteth you, being mixed with Faith, and reduced into Practice.—If his Heart be set on the Success of his Ministry, nothing will more discourage him, than to see that he labours in vain. “ Oh ! said the weeping Prophet,* that I had in the Wilderness a lodging Place of Way-faring Men, that I might leave my People, and go from them ; for they are all Adulterers, an Assembly of treacherous Men.” “ I marvel (said Mr. Baxter) at some ancient reverend Men, that have been twenty, or forty Years with an unprofitable People, where they have seen so little Fruit of their Labour, that it was scarce discernable, how they can with so much Patience there go on. Were it my Case, tho' I durst not leave the Vineyard, nor quit my Calling, yet I should suspect that it was God's Will, I should go some whither else, and another come thither ; that might be fitter for them, and I should not be easily satisfied to spend my Days in such a sort.” Let not your Minister ever have such Occasion to think of going from you. Be careful to improve in Knowledge and Holiness under his faithful Ad-

* Jer. 9. 2.

28 *The Levite not to be forsaken.*

ministrations. This will more than any Thing, endear, and attach you to each other. You will not easily forsake a Minister, so beneficial to your Souls ; nor a Minister easily forsake you, who will be thus his *Hope* and *Joy* in this Life, and his *Crown of Rejoycing in the Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, at his coming.* Amen.

Now I beseech all in this Assembly to suffer the Word of Exhortation ; That God may not forsake us, and cast us off forever, let us take heed unto ourselves, that we forsake not his Ministers, our faithful Guides, as long as we live upon the Earth. “ He that receiveth you, said Christ to his Apostles, receiveth me : and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me :---And he that despiseth you, despiseth me : and he that despiseth me, despiseth him that sent me.” Should we thus contemn the Goodness of God in sending his Embassadors of Peace to us, justly may he remove our Teachers into Corners, and punish this Land with an ignorant and unfaithful Ministry ; than which a greater Judgment is not to be deprecated by us. Upon the Jews undervaluing and Rejection of the good Shepherd, his two Staves, *Beauty*, and *Bands*, were broken ; and the Lord said unto the Prophet, “ Take unto thee yet the Instruments of a foolish Shepherd. For lo, I will raise up a Shepherd in the Land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that standeth still : but shall eat the Flesh of the Fat, and tear their Claws in pieces.” || The shaking Dispensations of Providence at this Day loudly warn us, to take heed, that we forsake not the Ordinance of God, the Gospel-Ministry, by which he is with us to establish, strengthen, and save us. *Wherefore, as the Holy Ghost saith, To Day if ye will bear his Voice, harden not your Hearts : harden them not as in the Provocation, in the Day of Temptation,* which the sacred History makes mention of, in 2 Chron. 36. 15, 16, “ The Lord God of their Fathers sent to them by his Messengers, rising up betimes, and

† Zec. 11. 15, 16.

sending .

sending ; because he had Compassion on his People, and on his Dwelling-Place : But they mocked the Messengers of God, and despised his Words, and misused his Prophets, until the Wrath of the Lord arose against his People, and there was no Remedy." God of his infinite Mercy prevent such being NEW-ENGLAND's Measure-filling Sin, and irremediable Ruin ! See that ye refuse not him that speaketh ; for if they escaped not who refused him that spake on Earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from Heaven : whose Voice then shook the Earth, but now he hath promised, saying, yet once more I shake not the Earth only, but also Heaven. And this Word yet once more, signifies the removing of those Things that are shaken, as of Things that are made, that those Things which cannot be shaken, may remain. Wherefore we receiving a Kingdom which cannot be moved, (the Kingdom of Christ set up on the Dissolution of the Jewish *Œconomy*, and shall continue to the End of Time) let us have Grace, whereby we may (in our several Stations and Capacities) serve God acceptably, with Reverence and godly Fear : for our God is a consuming Fire. †

† Heb. 12. 25. 29.

T H E E N D.







